

„Get your focus right!” Mark 6:30-34

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.

Mark’s message which we heard today, is closely linked together with the one which we meditated upon two weeks ago. Can you still remember it? It was about Jesus sending His disciples in mission.

Today we’ll continue to meditate upon the same topic and on what today’s Gospel passage teaches to us. Remember we talked about this widespread misunderstanding that to be a Christian means to be a good person. So many are misled and confused by this misperception.

The thinking goes that Christians are those supposedly good and moral people who meet together on Sundays to fine tune their goodness, but if I’m a good person on my own, then I don’t need to hear these moral teaching.

Thus people look at themselves, at what they do, at how they treat others and issue their verdict. ‘I’m pretty good a person, I’m better Christian than many who call themselves Christians.’ But where then is the focus? On whom then is the focus?

On ourselves. What I do. How I look. How good I am. It’s all about me. Me is the centre of the world. ‘Me’ is where we focus our attention. That’s the saddest part. People look at themselves, and wrongly believe that being a Christian is about being a good person.

We need to remember that being a Christian is *first* and foremost about receiving. Yes, not about doing, but about receiving. About learning how to live in receiving relationships with true God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

It is about focusing on God, on what He daily does for you, how He daily cares for you, learning to appreciate and rejoice in it. For He is the Creator and He is also your Creator. He created you, gave you life and daily provides for your needs.

He is the Saviour. As your God He offers to take upon Himself responsibility for all the wrong things you have done, and He offers you forgiveness and good conscience.

‘I’m guilty, I’m unworthy, I don’t deserve it, - but I am forgiven. I am accepted by God. He Himself calls me to be with Him.’ Christ removes the guilt and shame that separates you from God. Even as you don’t fully realize it.

Jesus reveals what the true God is like, what His attitude towards you is. Each of you. Even as He sees your heart, all your hidden thought and desires, He loves you with love that has no equal. He is ready to lay down His life only to save you.

He is the Holy Spirit. He creates your faith. That is, He creates this trust that allows you to live in peace and joy, seeing and enjoying God’s gifts, knowing that the true God is like your loving Father in heaven, that He is always with you.

Being a Christian is about living in relationships with this amazing Being to whom we owe everything, receiving His abundant love even as we don’t deserve it. It is not about looking at ourselves and thinking how good and self-sufficient we are.

Second thing that being a Christian means is – being on God’s mission. We are not created for an idle life. Once we have received God’s gifts we are sent to use them. Not for our sake only, but more importantly for the sake of others whom God has placed in our lives.

Martin Luther called us ‘God’s masks’, for this is who you are. Even if you don’t know it. God uses each of you to serve to and to bless people in your lives. He uses your talents and knowledge, your hearts and passions to care for others.

Each of you are His mask, His co-worker in caring for those around you. Your life can never be empty or boring once you know that you are all the time in God’s mission. In His mission to care for His creation and for His people.

But the most importantly, once this God has called you through His Son Jesus Christ to be with Him and to receive His blessings, you are sent right away to tell others about Him, to share these wonderful news.

You can say that once you are baptized, you are made not only a child of God, but also His messenger. His missionary. It becomes one of the main tasks in your life. To witness about God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In a way you can say, that your whole life should serve this task. Whatever you do, whomever you meet, you need to have this question in mind – how can I bring them to Christ? How can I bring them into God’s Kingdom?

This is what we discussed the last time. Being God’s missionaries. That we are to cultivate selfless, even self-sacrificial relationships with this purpose – to tell about this God to everyone who still don’t know Him.

To invite them to share their beliefs, their understanding about this world. Then to confess them what we believe and to witness about what the true God has done and is doing for them, and what He has prepared for them in the age to come.

This is what Jesus disciples were sent to do. Today we read that they returned back to Jesus and reported what they had done and taught. And then... then Jesus took care of them.

“He said to them, **“Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.”**” Come and have a rest! Elsewhere it is phrased as: **“Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”** (Mat 11:28)

This invitation applies to all of you as well. “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Let’s think about these words! They help us to appreciate why Christ gathers us together in His house.

We can say, - to give us rest, but there is much more to it. It is not simply a physical rest. One could possibly have a better physical rest sleeping a couple hours longer. What kind of rest then Christ invites you to receive?

What kind of rest do you need? Take your time, think about it. What is your labour, how are you heavy laden? What is your burden? It will differ from person to person. Your needs for rest will be unique for you.

What kind of rest does Jesus offer? He offers you exactly what you need. For He is the only one who knows exactly what you need. We all have our lives, our responsibilities, God’s uses us as His masks for unique groups of people.

He also sends us as His missionaries to unique groups of people. To those whom only you can touch in certain, unique a way. And you also are burdened by unique issues. Each of you in our own way.

May be you are struggling to serve the people God has put in your life. May be they are a kind of people you better see leaving than coming. May be they are able to bring out the worst from you by their presence alone.

They may even be those who are the closest to you. How burdensome it is to live in such relationships! May be you are struggling to serve others, because you are simply too busy with your own problems, and there simply is no time, no energy, and honestly, no desire left to do something for others.

May be you need to fight for your survival and instead of serving others you are at war with them. Anyway, when you know that you are expected to love and to serve all people in your life, it is burdensome to realize how broken our world is and how much we fail in our responsibilities. Sometimes because of us, sometimes because of others.

May be you haven’t got the idea that to be a Christian is primary about receiving and rejoicing in God’s attitude, His presence and His gifts. May be you are focusing too much on trying to be good, or on how much you fail to be good enough.

May be you think that your value, dignity and status depend on how much you do, how useful you are for others, so you strive and strive and when you succeed you feel great, and when you fail you feel miserable.

When we focus too closely on ourselves, we are left with ourselves. We may struggle to see what the point, the meaning for our lives is. Meaninglessness and failures are very heavy burdens. They can rob of your joy and peace, leaving emptiness and stress, with no hope.

May be you are taking seriously Jesus' command to share with others the good news, that God Himself has come to be with us and to bring us into His presence, into His Kingdom. You do your best, you try hard, and there are no visible results.

Or, maybe you fail to do what Christ has sent you to do. You don't know how to approach others. You don't know what to say. You know that you haven't done your part. You realize that you are by no means worthy of God's love.

These are only a few of things which may burden you. You may have different ones. Only you know. Marriage and family problem. Sicknesses. Problems in business. Loss of your trust in God the Father. Offenses by other Christians. Loneliness. Busyness. Etc.

I don't know your burdens. May be just a few of them. No human being knows them all. But Christ knows them all. He knows what kind of rest you need and He desires to give it to you. And He is the only one, who can give you true rest.

You see, that is not a true rest, when you simply have a time off. When you simply stop doing things for a while. It is good, and needed, and beneficial, but that is not the rest that Jesus was talking about.

You can have true rest only when you are welcomed and restored in the presence of the One, who created you and who truly knows your deepest needs. I heard that the Divine Service, this our gathering, was called the workshop of the Holy Spirit.

It means that when you respond to Jesus' invitation and come to the service, you put yourself in the hands of the Holy Spirit and entrust yourself to God. You come and by your presence say:

"I may not know what I need, but I trust that you know, and that you desire to provide for me, to care for me, to give me rest, to heal me, to restore me. I'm here. I'm yours. Take my burdens away and give me rest!"

This is why Jesus invites you here. To give you true rest. He knows all your struggles. He know all your deepest needs, and He is the answer to all of them. He can and He desires to restore you. To give you the most precious gift, Himself, His own presence.

This is why we are here. To be reminded that to be a Christian is to live receiving life. Learning how to receive God's gifts and to rejoice in them. To be reminded that even as we are sent to serve others and to share with them what true God is like, we don't do it on our own.

The point is – we do everything together with our God. This is what is important for Him. He is not so much interested in results of our efforts, for there is nothing we could do that He couldn't do in a million others way. He doesn't need your good works.

He wants you. You! What He is interested is doing things together with you. Like loving parents who teach a child how to turn a steering wheel, or how to make a meal, they don't look for the child to drive them somewhere or to feed them.

They simply enjoy these loving relationships. The same way your Father in Heaven; He gives you numerous tasks, but He is with you in all of them, He enjoys being with you, and He wants you to enjoy what you do together with Him.

Take this thought with you today. To be a Christian, to be a child of God is not about focusing on you, on your own goodness or lack of it. It is about learning to receive everything from your Father in Heaven, and to testify about His person to others.

And even as you are sent into God's mission, to love and to serve others and to witness about Jesus Christ, the emphasis is not on your doing, but on you being together with your God in all that you do.

If with God's help you get this right, it makes your life very rich, indeed, very rich and blessed. Enjoy it together with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.